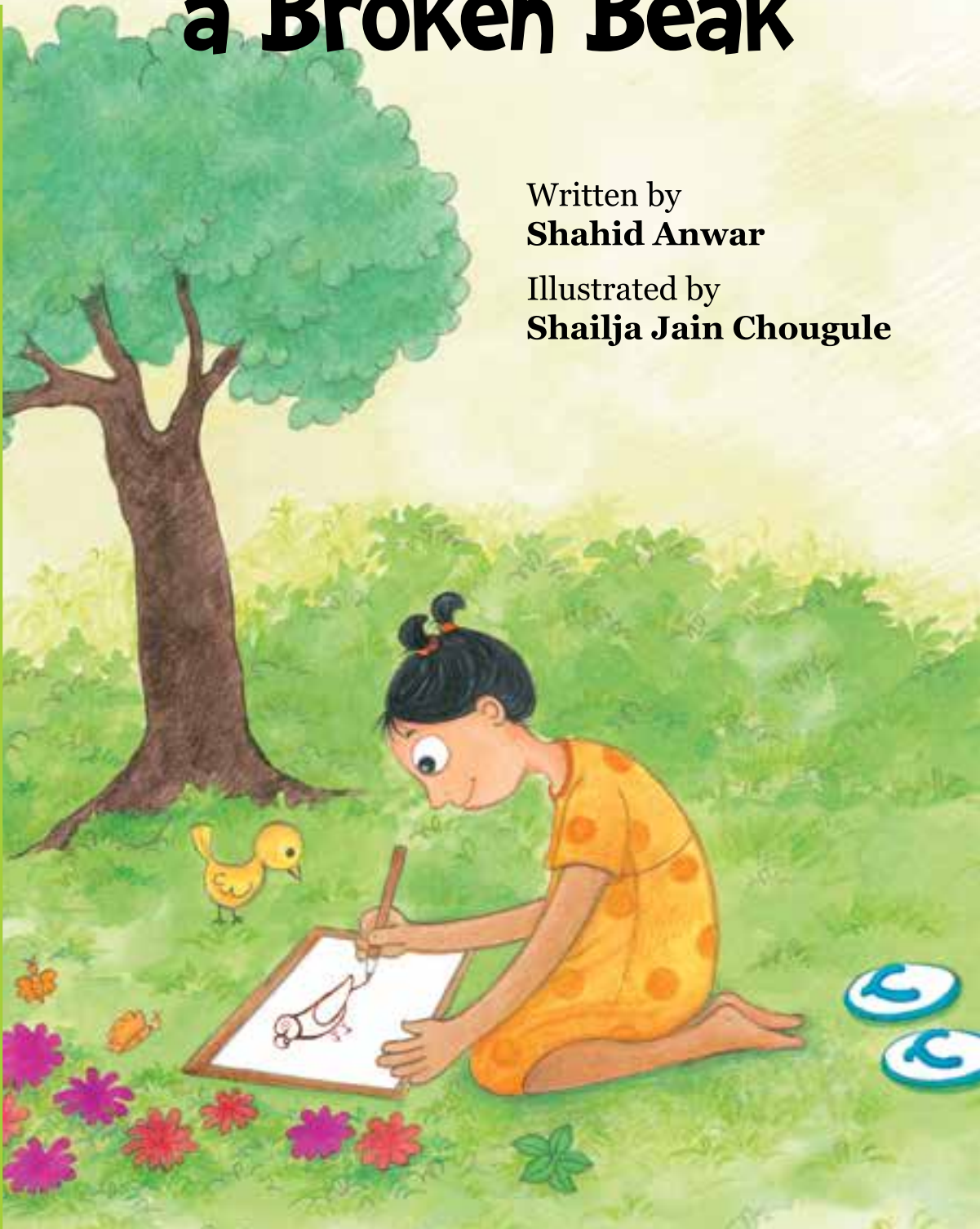




# The Parrot with a Broken Beak

Written by  
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Illustrated by  
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Illustrations: Shailja Jain Chougule

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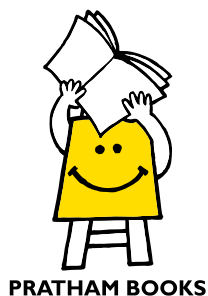
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Babuji's pen lay on the table tempting little Kasni. She felt it was pulling her like a magnet. She wanted to pick it up and draw. On paper, on the floor and on the wall. Anywhere...as long as she could draw. She knew how to draw a few things well now. A pot, a mango and a parrot...



Kasni had first tried to draw with pieces of red brick. A pot, a mango or a parrot on the floor or on the trunk of a tree. Then she was given a piece of white chalk and told to try her hand on her black slate. A white parrot taking shape on a black slate was good, but soon she was tired of it. 'This is no fun...so many colours all around me but my pot, my mango and my parrot are all just...white,' she thought.







“I don’t want this chalk!” she told her father one day.

“Why?” Babuji could not understand why she was bored.

“Because I can only make white things with it.”

“Well, with a white chalk, you can only make white things!” he smiled.

“But there are so many other colours!”

“Right,” said Babuji beginning to see the problem. He put his hand into his office bag and pulled out a pencil.

“Here, try this,” said Babuji. Kasni's face lit up. His bag could be her slate, she thought. But before the tip of the pencil touched the bag, Babuji stopped her.

“No. Not on this. I will give you a piece of paper.”

Kasni did not lose a moment. Her fingers and the pencil danced like magic on the lovely blank sheet.





Now her pot was brown. Her mango and her parrot were a lovely brown too. Kasni always had her precious pencil with her. At home, in school and in the garden, she carried it with her. This was fine for a few days until one day she was bored...again. How can everything be brown and only brown?

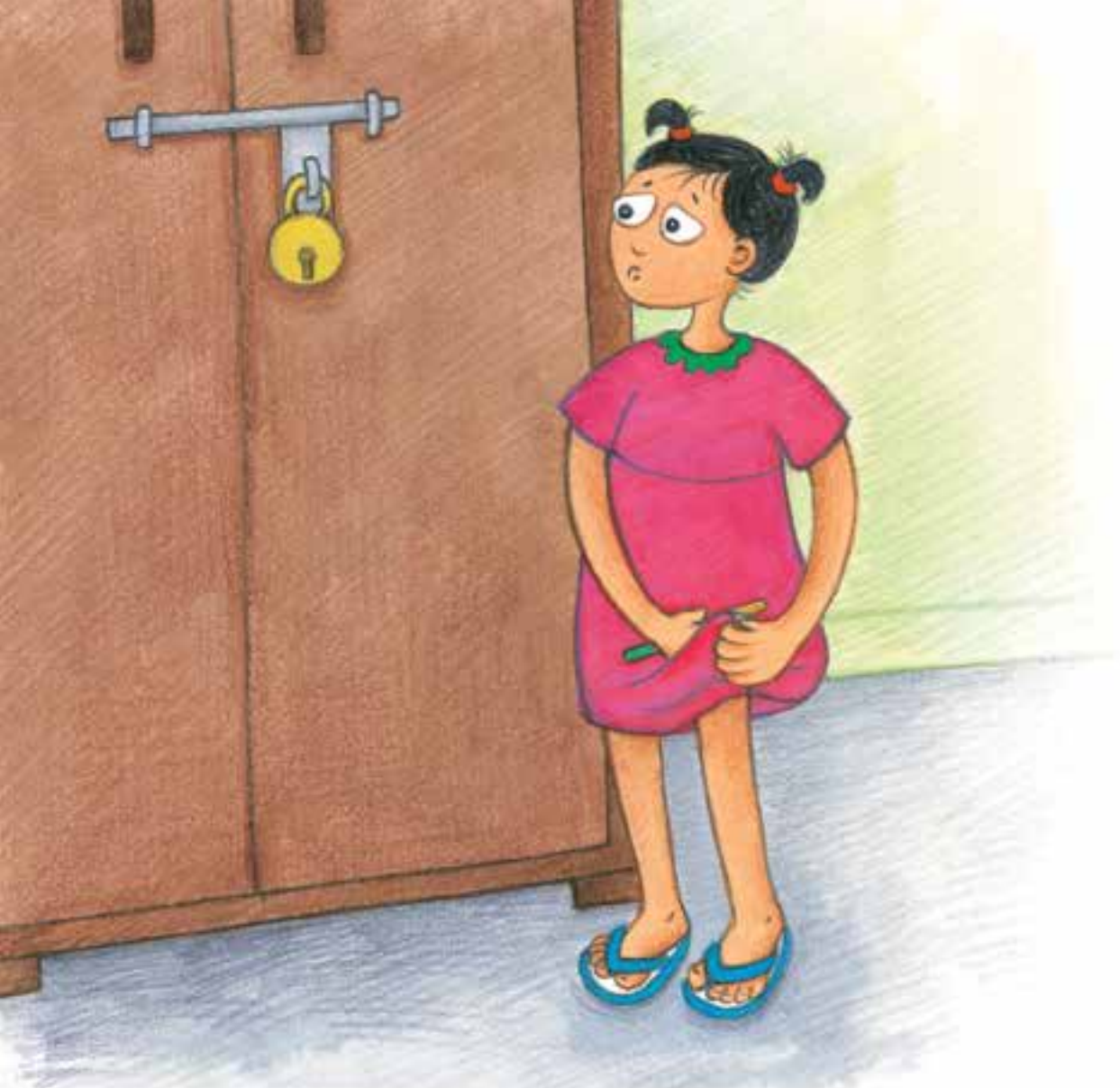


Babuji's pen lying on the table could free her from a brown world. Babuji always filled it with blue ink. It was his most favourite pen and stayed in his office bag. Today it lay outside for some reason. Kasni looked at it longingly. Its golden cap resting on its green body looked very grand. Like a golden crown on a rich green bed of grass. Blue ink winked through the transparent part in the body. When the pen was used a lot, the blue ink dropped down like mercury in a thermometer when your fever goes down.





Kasni went closer. The blue ink in the green pen seemed to send her a signal and she picked it up. She turned the cap and took it off. The slim, light-yellow nib seemed to smile at her. Kasni touched its tip. Ah! It was like the delicate nip of a butterfly. She replaced the cap and hid the pen in her dress.



‘I need paper. A plain white sheet of paper,’ she thought. ‘Ah, where can I get it?’ Her mind raced. ‘Let me tear off a page from my school note book so that nobody will know.’ She ran to the room with the cupboard. But her mother’s cupboard was locked. Her school bag was in the same cupboard. ‘Oh! When will Ma come back? When will this lock be opened? And how will I tear off a page in front of her?’



The pen hidden in her dress tickled her. The ink sparkled blue in the green pen. Kasni took off the cap again. The yellow nib still smiled at her. Kasni looked to her left and then to her right. In front of her was a white wall as inviting as a sheet of paper. Kasni went closer. ‘What shall I make?’ she thought, as she gently tapped her head with the other end of the pen, just like she had seen Babuji do so often. By the third tap, she knew. ‘A parrot!’

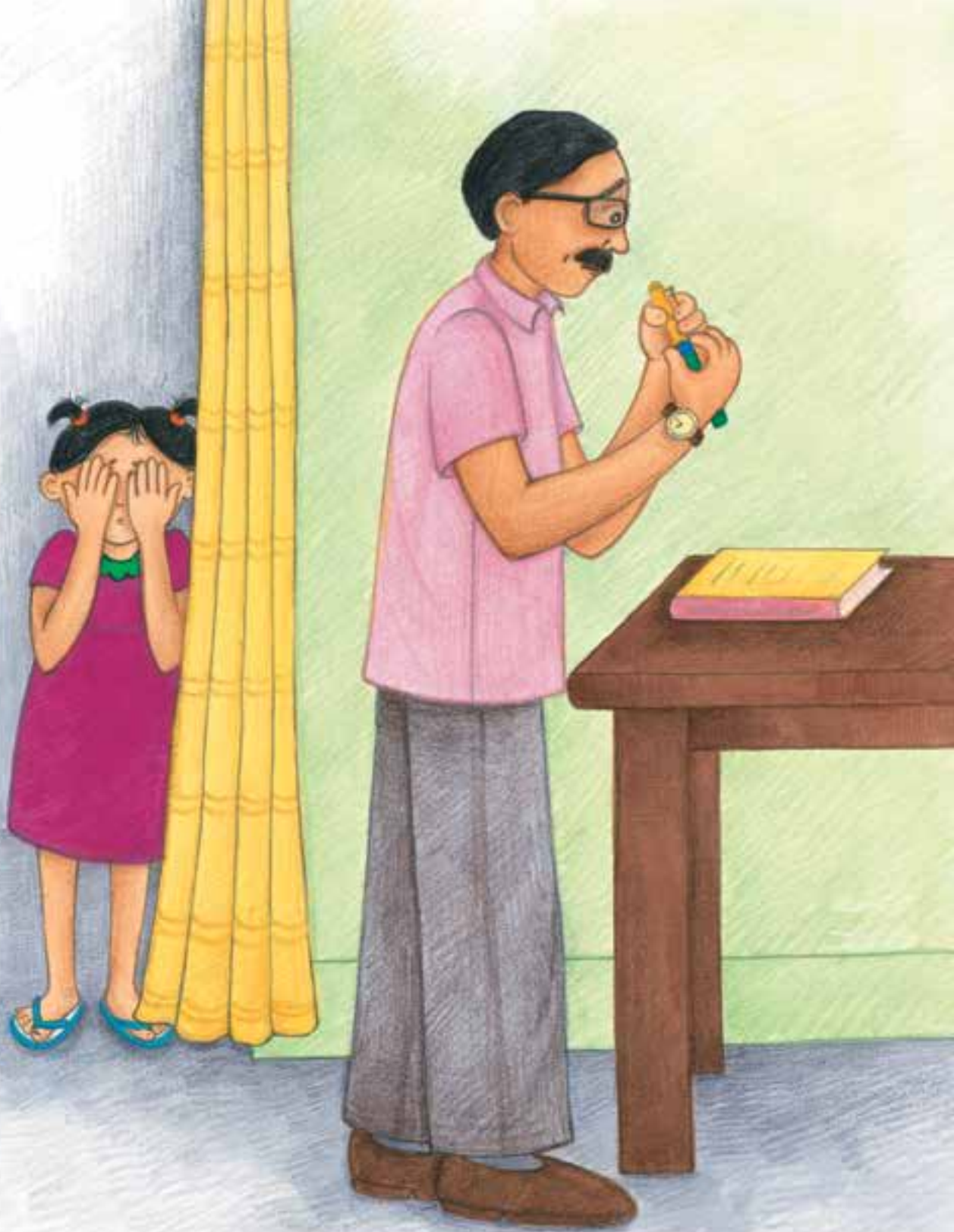
She put the pen to the wall but the uneven surface made it hard for the pen to work. The lines drawn to make the parrot’s body began to waver. As Kasni tried to work better the pen began to make scratchy sounds. A scared Kasni examined the nib. The tip of the nib had some powdery lime on it. The blue wavy lines on the stark white wall looked beautiful. Kasni felt her power over one more colour. She cleaned the tip of her nib with her dress and began drawing the beak of the parrot.



Scratch...scratch...the scratchiness grew. Kasni pressed a little harder and the pen stopped.

Kasni pressed again. A soft sound, 'chat' and the nib broke. Kasni froze. She felt the tip of the nib in a panic. The tip had parted into two bits that curled sadly in different directions. Babuji's favourite pen in this state! What would happen when Babuji would return in the evening! She quickly closed the pen and kept it on the table.





As evening came closer, her heart beat so hard that she did not go out to play. Babuji came home and went into the inner room. Kasni's heart was in her mouth. Babuji looked relieved to see the pen on the table. He picked it up to put it in his bag. Kasni thought she had been saved. But no, he changed his mind. He was taking off the cap as if to check if the pen was fine before he put it in his bag. Kasni covered her eyes with her hands in fright.

“Who touched my pen?” he rumbled angrily. It seemed he had seen the wall. Kasni trembled as she came in.

“Did you do this?” asked Babuji, waving the pen in front of her. He pointed to the wall and said, “You ruined the pen and the wall. Now set it right.” He flung the pen down. Kasni had never seen him so angry.

Kasni looked at her mother who was trying to rub off the parrot on the wall. Half the parrot's beak had vanished. It looked as if Ma had broken its beak. Kasni looked at it and burst into tears. Ma tried to soothe her and finally led her to the outer room.

Kasni's tears flowed freely. She wiped them in vain and her nose ran. Suddenly she heard a tapping on the window. Her mouth hung open as she saw the same parrot sitting on the ledge outside. The parrot with the broken beak! It had to be some other parrot! She thought it must be some other parrot that had come flying there by chance.







But this parrot was not green, it was blue! The same blue as the ink in Babuji's pen. "This is my parrot! The one I drew on the wall!" She ran to the window.

"You? Here?"

"Yes, I'm here!" The parrot's voice was unlike that of other parrots. It had a hiss rather than a twang.

"But how did you get here?"

"Why? Didn't you draw me on the wall?"

"Yes. What is your name?" asked Kasni.

"You will have to give me a name as you drew me."

“Right. Let me think...” said Kasni tapping her head like Babuji. “Neelkanth...no, that is another bird. Neelgai...no, that is another kind of cow, I think. Then...Neelpankhi... your name is Neelpankhi, the one with the blue feathers.”

“Why Neelpankhi?”

“Because you are blue and not green like other parrots. Your feathers are as blue as the ink in Babuji’s pen. Got it Miya Mitthu?” Kasni felt quite proud of how smart she was.

Mitthu rather liked his name too. He opened his beak to say ‘tain tain’ but instead of a twang there came a soft hiss. The parrot looked sad.

“What is wrong with your voice? Why don’t you speak clearly as other parrots do?”

“This is how a broken-beaked parrot sounds!” said Neelpankhi morosely. Kasni felt angry with Ma.



“It is all Ma’s fault. If she had not wiped the wall, your beak would not have broken.”

“It is not your Ma’s fault.”

“Whose fault was it then?”

“Yours!”

“How is it my fault?”

“You should not have drawn me on the wall. You broke the pen and my beak. If you had drawn me on paper, the pen and my beak would have been safe. I’d come to tell you this...and I had better be going now,” Neelpankhi said as he flew away.







“Wait! Listen to me!” Kasni leapt to catch him. Her head bumped against the window frame. “Oh!” she said as her eyes flew open. She was on her bed. Her head had bumped against the wall. The parrot was on the wall with its broken beak.



Kasni woke up next morning. She could hear Babuji's voice from the other room. She got up quietly and went to him. Babuji had his back to her as he read the paper. "Babuji," she said. He turned and looked at her with deep eyes. He did not speak. Kasni lifted her hands and held her ears, silently saying sorry. Babuji got up and hugged her.

"Little Kasni, I will get colour pencils and paper for you today. Draw a green parrot with a full beak. Call it Suapankhi, the one with the green feathers."

Kasni's eyes shone as she thought of that.



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Shahid Anwar is an author, playwright and a translator who writes both in Urdu and Hindi. Known for his powerful but simple style, his plays have been performed across the country. His successful plays include *Gair Zaroori Log*, *Soopna Ka Sapna* and *Hamare Waqt Mein*. Shahid has received many accolades for his outstanding work in the field of theatre including the Mohan Rakesh Samman and Urdu Academy Delhi's Urdu Drama Award. Shahid lives in Delhi.



A love for lines and cinema took Shailja Jain Chougule to National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, where she studied animation film design. She loves dogs, trees, cycling, and roaming around to discover stories. Currently residing in a small city, she illustrates and designs animation films.

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